



When you think of the future, what color do you see? CBF Sessions participants asked elementary school students at Park Avenue Baptist Church's Literacy Camp this question along with several more as part of the 2017 CBF Global General Assembly in Atlanta. The answers were as unique as each child interviewed.

Trey Lyons, CBF Field Personnel and Pastor of Communication and Engagement at Park Avenue, Atlanta, shared the staggeringly high statistics of high-school dropout rates and students reading at lower levels than academically appropriate for age. After gaining valuable

insights from Trey about Literacy Camp, which runs four weeks each summer, along with historical and sociological information about the area where

## hearts singing

by Jaime Fitzgerald, CBFNC Collegiate Ministry Intern, Western Carolina University

the church is located, our group spent time learning about some of the individual campers by asking some of the following questions: *What makes your heart sing? What is your daily routine? What is a typical dinner conversation at your house? What scares you? What are you most excited about for the future?*

Our group consisted of nine young adults from many different walks of life, some seminary or college students and others discerning vocation. By the end of Sessions, we all learned what it means to see and love humanity through the eyes of Christ. The time spent talking with the students was eye-opening, enlightening, heart-breaking, honest, and beautiful, as the answers spoken by preschool to fifth-grade students forced our group to see that childhood for many is not filled with hopscotch and kickball but with the anxiety of deportation and financial instability.

As our group observed the children playing and laughing, we could not tell from the outside how much pain each little body held. Through the noise of singing and reading, we could not hear the gurgle of hunger in their bellies. When we took time to listen to the sacred story each child shared with us, we found that dinnertime was not a spread of vegetables and meat with parents asking about their day. Rather, dinner often was a meal alone consisting of leftovers or whatever could be found, without their parents who were working late into the evening to make ends meet.

Literacy Camp at Park Avenue provides a safe space for children to simply be children. Literacy Camp nourishes children physically with breakfast and lunch each day, emotionally with the stability of caring and compassionate adult leaders, and educationally by creating space for reading and learning to increase confidence and competency.

Though the children still worry about apartment eviction and how their family will pay the bills, their words of hope infinitely overpowered the worries. When we asked, "What makes your heart sing?", their faces lit up. Their voices strengthened, offering answers such as seeing people smile, country and pop music, colorful unicorns, and reading. The colors of these children's future are indeed bright — red, teal, yellow, blue, and pink to be exact.

